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- ART. II. — 1. *Théâtre de EUGÈNE SCRIBE, de l'Académie Française.* Paris: Michel Levy, Frères. 1859. 20 vols. 16mo.
2. *Les Contemporains. — Scribe.* Par EUGÈNE DE MIRECOURT. Avec un Portrait et un Autographe. Quatrième Édition. Paris: Gustave Havard, Éditeur. 1856.
3. *Le Constitutionnel.* Samedi, 23 Février, 1861.

ON the morning of the 22d of February, 1861, the writer of this article was returning from the Palais Royal to his lodgings in Paris, through the Rue St. Honoré, when his progress was arrested by a dense crowd gathered in front of the church of Saint-Roch. The centre of the street was filled by a long procession, stretching from the Place Vendôme to the portals of the church, which was draped in funereal black. This ancient edifice, beneath which repose the ashes of Voltaire, and which witnessed during the last century some of the most frightful atrocities of the French Revolution, was this day the scene of a striking, and for many reasons a remarkable ceremony. The most eminent men in France were assembled within its walls, to pay a last tribute of respect and affection to one who, for nearly half a century, had held possession of the French stage, achieving in that period a long list of brilliant successes, hardly interrupted by a failure. The pall-bearers were M. Dumas, President of the Municipal Board of Paris, Vitet, Director of the French Academy, Thierry, Director of the Théâtre Français, and Auguste Maquet, President of the Club of Authors and Dramatic Composers. The French Academy was represented by some of the most distinguished members, — among them Cousin, a striking figure, with venerable white hair, Thiers, the author of "The Consulate and the Empire," the Duc de Broglie, and others. The Prefect of the Seine and a deputation of the municipal authorities, with whom Scribe had been associated in office, attested by their presence the respect in which the deceased had been held as a citizen. The actors attached to the four leading theatres of Paris, the Théâtre Français, the Opéra, the Opéra Comique, and the Gymnase (all which were closed through the evening), appro-

priately paid their homage to the author in whose fame they had so often participated. The Minister of State, the Minister of Public Instruction, Count de Walewski, M. Baroche, President of the Council of State, and numerous other members of the imperial government, lent dignity to the occasion. Notwithstanding a drizzling rain which fell through the greater part of the day, not less than three thousand persons, embracing those most distinguished by social and literary eminence, took part in the funeral services, and followed the remains of Scribe to their last resting-place in the cemetery of Père la Chaise.

Selecting a favorable point for observation, the writer watched with interest the shifting figures in the procession, as with slow steps and subdued demeanor they passed before him. Poets, philosophers, *savants*, novelists, dramatic writers, diplomatists, and cabinet ministers, — representatives of the wit, wisdom, science, imagination, and statesmanship of France, — had met to-day for a common purpose, and were moved with a common sorrow. Nor they alone, but even the workman, in his ragged blouse, who sometimes on fête-days had occupied a cheap seat in a minor theatre, felt that he had suffered a personal loss, and, as the funeral car passed, doffed his cap and remained standing with uncovered head, murmuring in regretful accents, “*Scribe est mort !*”

At the close of the religious services at the cemetery, eulogies were pronounced upon the deceased by M. Vitet in behalf of the French Academy, and by M. Maquet in behalf of the authors and dramatists of France. Speeches of a less elaborate character were made by M. Thierry, Administrator-General of the Comédie Française, and Montigny, Director of the Gymnase. Everything conspired to make the occasion solemn and imposing. Numerous as had been the triumphs of this “most fruitful of vaudevillists, past, present, and to come,” as his biographer has styled him, it was reserved for him to achieve his proudest triumph at the moment when he was called upon to surrender all earthly distinction. While it may be doubted whether, in any other country than France, a laborer in the field in which Scribe obtained celebrity could have gained a recognition so marked and universal, the fact of such a recognition renders the circumstances of his career a subject of in-

terest to the world of letters. It is our design in the present article to record the incidents of his literary life, tracing the causes of his great popularity, with general remarks upon such incidental topics as may be suggested by it. A detailed examination of his numerous works would require much more space than we have at command, and would be inconsistent with our present purpose.

Augustin Eugène Scribe was born in Paris, December 25, 1791. His parents belonged to the *bourgeoisie*, his father keeping a shop at the corner of the Rue de la Regnie. The antiquary who shall seek for the cradle of the dramatist will, however, be doomed to disappointment, since the march of improvement, which has obliterated so many old landmarks in Paris, has not spared the *magasin de nouveautés* kept by Scribe, *père*. On the death of his father — an event which occurred while he was still an infant — Scribe's mother sold out the shop, and took apartments in the neighborhood of the church of Saint-Roch. Madame Scribe was doubtless left in comfortable, and even prosperous circumstances, since we are assured by her son's biographer that his patrimony yielded him an income of from four to five thousand francs per annum. Thus he was spared the hard struggle with poverty which, in the early history of distinguished men, seems to be the rule rather than the exception. Young Scribe pursued his studies at the College of Saint Barbe, in Paris, where his proficiency won for him the honor of a public coronation. It was at this place that he made the acquaintance of Casimir and Germain Delavigne, — an acquaintance which kindred tastes ripened into enduring friendship. These two brothers, who, like Scribe, were destined to win a high position in letters, were afterwards intimately associated with him in his literary plans.

It was the earnest desire of Madame Scribe that her son should adopt the profession of the law. This ambition she shared in common with the class to which she belonged. From the Palace of Justice the way lies open to the Palais Bourbon. The advocate may become a deputy, — the deputy a cabinet minister. But this career, however promising in the eyes of the mother, proved quite repugnant to the tastes of the son, and although, at her request, he consented to enter the office of

an attorney, he made so little progress in the study of his new profession as to inspire in his instructor very mean ideas of his capacity. The death of his mother at this juncture completely changed his plans, and determined him to relinquish what he had hitherto only endured out of deference to his mother's wishes.

Freed at length from the trammels of a distasteful profession, Scribe lost no time in following the bent of his inclinations. He renewed his intimacy with his college friend, Germain Delavigne, in conjunction with whom he wrote a kind of farce, denominated a Harlequinade, to which he gave the name of *Les Dervis*. The young men had introduced themselves to M. Dupin, a dramatist of some note, whose influence procured this piece to be represented at the Vaudeville theatre. But the public, afterward so lavish of their applause, greeted coldly the first effort of the young dramatists. Undismayed they again set to work, and produced at intervals three other pieces, which so far failed of success, that the actors who took part in them were not only hissed, but actually pelted from the stage. This reception was little calculated to encourage the friends. But Scribe felt convinced that he knew himself better than the public yet knew him. He was resolved to achieve success by his constancy. In this emergency M. Dupin came once more to their assistance. He obtained for them an introduction to the stage of the Variétés. It was hoped that a new audience, unprejudiced by the memory of former failures, would reverse the verdict pronounced at the Vaudeville. But *Le Bachelier de Salamanque*, the new candidate for public favor, failed to accomplish the much desired end. At this fresh failure, Germain Delavigne, modestly attributing their ill fortune to his own share in the work, withdrew from the partnership. Scribe returned to the Vaudeville, and submitted to the public a new piece, *Barbanera, ou les Bossus*. But the young dramatist seemed to have been born under an evil star. The pit was not in a humor to be pleased. *Barbanera* was not performed a second time.

If we have dwelt somewhat at length upon the inauspicious commencement of Scribe's career, it is partly because it is in such striking contrast with the remarkable popularity which

he afterwards enjoyed, and partly because it illustrates in a forcible manner the calm and resolute persistency with which he pursued his purpose. A firm determination to accept as final no verdict which is not favorable, has more than once secured success where failure seemed inevitable. It is well known that "Jane Eyre" long sought a publisher in vain. It is not so well known that Miss Braddon, the author of "Lady Audley's Secret," and other popular novels recently published, only two or three years ago was living in obscurity in London, her advances coldly repulsed by the very publishers who now offer her thousands of pounds for a new work. The words which Bulwer puts into the mouth of Richelieu, when a young attendant suggests the possibility of failure in a hazardous service required of him, admirably describe the spirit in which Scribe bore the discouragements that met him at the outset of his literary life : —

" Fail ? — fail ?

In the lexicon of youth, which Fate reserves
For a bright manhood, there is no such word
As *fail* ! "

In reference to this period M. Maquet says, in his address at the funeral of Scribe : —

" If by any possibility there be present a single person whose soul is filled with envy when he contemplates the wealth and reputation which Scribe has acquired, let him be told now how dearly they were purchased. Nothing but frowns and pitiless disaster greeted him at the commencement of his career. Four years yielded him repeated failures. It was only in the fifth that he gained his first success. A year afterward he gained a second, and he had to wait another year for the third. Fortune obstinately withheld her favors. He was compelled to snatch them from her unwilling grasp."

Scribe turned his experience to good account. Reflection satisfied him that he had failed because he had been content to follow in the beaten track, where his own genius was hampered by rules of dramatic composition conformed to the fashion of a bygone age. He determined to abandon the ruts of custom, and to strike out a new path. He resolved, like Molière, to paint the manners of his own age, — to avail himself of whatever occupied the public mind for the time being, — to bring

upon the stage the generals and the colonels of the Empire,—to seek his characters in the street, the market, and the shop,—in fine, to make his vaudevilles reflect the passing hour. The public demanded something fresh. They had become tired of Racine, Corneille, and even of Molière. As variable in their tastes as ever was the Athenian Demos, they were prepared to welcome the new, simply because it differed from the old. The Parisians are not exceptional in this choice. Not long since, the proprietor of one of the London penny weeklies which circulate by hundreds of thousands throughout the British Islands, and furnish a considerable part of the reading matter for the lower classes, with the view of supplying his readers with superior mental food, dismissed his staff of sensation novelists, and commenced the serial publication of the most popular of the Waverley novels. But they lacked the flavor of the present, and a rapidly diminishing subscription-list warned the publisher that he must abandon his experiment, or be ruined. So with the Parisian public. The classic drama had lost its interest, and they eagerly demanded something different. As soon as he had satisfied himself of this, Scribe, in conjunction with M. Delestre-Poirson, wrote a *comédie-vaudeville* in one act, entitled *Une Nuit de la Garde Nationale*. It gained a fame immediate and brilliant. It was clear that our dramatist had struck a vein.

The tide had at length turned. Success now became the rule, and failure the rare exception. Assured that he had not mistaken his vocation, Scribe threw himself into it with all the energy of his nature. In conjunction with different collaborators, he produced comedies and vaudevilles in profusion; but the demand now equalled the supply. He opened what might not inappropriately be called a dramatic shop, where he furnished vaudevilles to order. How rapidly he acquired reputation and wealth may be inferred from the statement, that in 1830 he was already deriving from his dramatic compositions an income of sixty thousand francs, while his pieces had made his name familiar to the theatre-going public in London and the principal Continental cities. Some of the most popular farces now in possession of the English and American stage are adapted from the writings of the French dramatist.

The attention of the reader has doubtless been drawn to the use which Scribe made of his collaborators; and the question will no doubt suggest itself, how far he was indebted to their assistance. The general subject of collaboration is an interesting one, and requires some explanation.

In English literature, partnership is almost unknown. The association of Beaumont and Fletcher will at once occur to all; and it must be acknowledged that the contributions of the two poets assimilate so well that it is difficult to discover from internal evidence what parts were furnished by each. Some years ago, G. P. R. James, as prolific in his department as the subject of our article, published a short novel in partnership with another writer. It is our impression, however, that it met with a success by no means marked. In another instance, a serial story in twenty chapters was furnished to an American literary paper, each chapter by a different writer. Joint authorship, however, will probably never prevail to any extent in England or America. But in France the socialistic principle, so popular in other forms, has likewise invaded literature. The extraordinary fecundity of such writers as Dumas is thus readily accounted for. Indeed, there is good reason to believe that the reputation of this author is due quite as much to his collaborators as to himself. It has been established in a French court of law that some of the romances which, under Dumas's name, have obtained the widest popularity, are entirely the work of one of his collaborators. Yet so lasting are first impressions, that the real author of "The Three Guardsmen" and "The Count of Monte Christo" will be forgotten by posterity, while Dumas will be admired for that to which he has no rightful claim. Such wholesale appropriation of the labors of others admits of no defence. Even where the collaborator is amply compensated for the concession of his rights, the public may justly complain of the imposition practised upon them.

It should be stated, however, in reference to M. Scribe, that he has always acted with the utmost fairness towards his collaborators. He has taken care that they should be defrauded neither of the public favor, nor of the pecuniary compensation to which their labors entitled them. He has never failed to

announce the names of his associates, however inconsiderable may have been their contributions. Indeed, to such an extreme did he carry his generosity, that it is the testimony of M. Carmouche, that, in a dozen vaudevilles which he enjoyed the reputation of having written in conjunction with Scribe, there was not a line to which he could lay claim. It is related that M. Dupin, who had been the first to aid Scribe by his influence, one day brought to his former *protégé* a piece, of very moderate merit, in two acts, and with but two characters. Scribe added one part, made alterations in the others, cut out one act, recast the piece entirely, and gave it a different name. All this was done without the knowledge of Dupin. Three weeks afterward Scribe called upon him, and gave him an invitation to be present at the Gymnase theatre in the evening. "Your 'Michel and Christine' is to be brought out?" queried Dupin. "You are right," was the reply. The two authors entered the theatre, and Dupin was soon absorbed in his friend's piece. "Admirable!" he exclaimed at the end of the third scene. "Who was your collaborator?" "You will hear at the close of the piece," returned Scribe, as the vaudeville neared its conclusion. Dupin was puzzled by a scene which seemed familiar, though he could not remember where he had met with it. The mystery was cleared up when, at the close of the representation, the manager came forward and announced MM. Scribe and Dupin as the joint authors of the piece. Scribe turned a smiling face towards his astonished friend, saying, "It is a bad father who does not recognize his own children." "Parbleu!" retorted Dupin, "who could, when they are changed at nurse?"

It may be safely assumed, that, of the three hundred and fifty plays which have been published under the name of Scribe, the chief merits belong to himself. No man could so readily have afforded to dispense with foreign assistance as he. In many instances he accepted collaborators at their own earnest request. Persons of the highest eminence are said to have sought the honor of associating their names with his in this way. It is even asserted that Louis Philippe himself produced a vaudeville in conjunction with Scribe. This, if true, would attach to the semi-royal production a curious interest.

The unity which pervades the numerous dramas of Scribe affords presumptive evidence that, whatever contributions may have been supplied by others, the form and spirit of the whole are due to him. His constructive talent is remarkable. At his skilful touch order emerges out of chaos, discordant characters and situations harmonize, and the various parts are so artfully arranged as to produce the greatest possible effect. Everything is nicely adjusted, and, though much may be commonplace, the result is pleasing. Intent upon dramatic effect, Scribe has paid especial attention to the *dénouements* of his dramas. In these, the element of unexpectedness plays a prominent part. To secure this he does not hesitate at times to violate nature and probability. But it must be remembered that he is writing for a French audience, which is not disposed to be critical provided the interest of the play be well sustained, and the movement sufficiently lively to rivet the attention to the end. So in other parts of his dramatic writings an English critic will find much to complain of, in absurd and improbable situations; but the author does not overrate his own abilities, adroitly manages to impart an artificial and temporary *vraisemblance* to what is most forced and false, and triumphantly brings the whole to a satisfactory conclusion. His biographer, Eugène de Mirecourt, thus speaks of the effect which Scribe produces upon the spectator: —

“Once involved in the inextricable network of plot, counterplot, and intrigue which Scribe weaves about you, you are no longer master of yourself. You must submit forthwith to his guidance. Even against your will, you must, for the time being, suspend the exercise of your taste and judgment, and admire blindly whatever he sees fit to present to you. Your eyes are riveted upon the stage, and you feel no inclination to withdraw them. The most common expression amuses you; a dialogue which you would never have consented to read, commands your fixed attention. You follow eagerly all the intricacies of the plot, from the commencement to the conclusion of the piece. When it is finished, perhaps you ask, ‘After all, what does it amount to?’ Your question comes too late. The five acts have been played. You have followed them to the end with unflagging interest. The effect which the author had in view has been produced.”

Allowing for the exaggerations of a biographer interested in

his subject, it is obvious that a writer who can produce such effects, not once only, but in hundreds of instances, must be a consummate artist. The French people demanded to be amused, — Scribe knew how to amuse them. Nor have the first favorable impressions been affected by the lapse of years. The principal works of our dramatist have been represented hundreds of times, yet without producing satiety.

Scribe has shown himself a writer of infinite address, and has adapted his productions to the changing circumstances of the times. One who will take the trouble to consider how fruitful of vicissitude the last half-century has been in French politics, will comprehend how much is included in this statement. It is difficult to believe that Scribe has ever been actuated by deep and earnest political convictions. They would only have been in the way of his success. He trimmed his sails to suit the shifting breezes of public opinion, and satirized all parties by turns. He did not attempt the perilous task of leading public taste. It has been his highest ambition to follow it. For this reason we shall search his works in vain for great vital ideas, expressed in glowing language, calculated insensibly to draw up his auditors to a higher plane of thought and feeling. His object was to make himself an agreeable companion for the lighter moments, but nothing more. The grave glance of the censor never appears behind the comic mask. Nor can it be said that he has contributed much to the progress of his art, or the enrichment of the language. His works are clever specimens of the present state of the drama, but they do not seek to rise above the present. Perhaps their chief value in the eyes of posterity will be that they are sharp-cut pictures of the manners and modes of thought prevailing at the precise time at which they were written. They reflect admirably the tastes of the day. This naturally results from the persistent habit which Scribe had of ignoring the past, taking no thought for the future, and studying only the present.

We should not censure an author, however, for not accomplishing more than he intended. So far as the objects which he proposed to himself were concerned, Scribe was one of the most successful of literary men. Probably posthumous fame had few attractions for him, compared with the applause of the

moment, and a large balance at his banker's. In the accumulation of wealth he was more fortunate than any French writer of his age, — perhaps of any age. Towards the close of his life his receipts are said to have amounted to one hundred and eighty thousand francs in a single year. At his death he left an estate of from two to three millions of francs, — mainly the fruit of his literary labors.

He is charged by his biographer with having carried into literature the mercantile instincts which he inherited from his father, and having labored less from a love of letters, and a desire to advance the interests of literature and add to the sum of human knowledge, than from a sordid desire of gain. This is, perhaps, not wholly just. While Scribe had a strong love of money, he never sought to defraud his fellow-laborers of their just share of the proceeds of their joint toils. In some instances he gave them more than they merited. He was liberal of his wealth, particularly to brother authors and dramatists, and is admitted to have given away during his life not less than half a million of francs. Scribe made several excursions into the territory of romance, being the author of some half-dozen novels contributed to *Le Siècle*. For one of these — *Piquillo Alliaga* — he is said to have received sixty thousand francs. His romances, however, do him little credit. The very qualities which made him an admirable writer of vaudevilles, unfitted him for the construction and execution of a novel. He wrote with the stage always before him, and this proved fatal to his success. The large compensation which he received was no doubt based upon his reputation in a different field, and probably proved an unprofitable investment.

Surprise will probably be felt when it is stated that Scribe has produced more poetry than either Lamartine or Victor Hugo. Those familiar with his plays will not fail to have noticed that they are liberally interspersed with verses. These, if collected, would make a volume of formidable proportions. Their merit, however, is very slender, as probably no one knew better than Scribe himself. They were written because the prevailing fashion in dramatic composition required them, and, though faulty, even in mechanical structure, they answered the purpose for which they were designed. In the first piece

which met with decided favor, the verses were contributed by Casimir and Germain Delavigne, who succeeded much better in this department of composition than Scribe.

Some of our readers will be interested in learning that Scribe furnished the *libretti* of several well-known operas,—among them of *Robert le Diable*, *Le Huguenots*, and *Le Prophète*, written for Meyerbeer. Auber also is under similar obligations to him.

The prodigious amount of literary work with which Scribe must be credited, after making all reasonable allowance for the contributions of his collaborators, makes an inquiry into his habits of labor a matter of interest. It was his custom, we are told, to rise at five, winter and summer,—a habit, it may be remarked, much more general in France than in our own country. He at once stationed himself at an elevated desk which permitted him to write standing. He was occupied with the task of composition until noon, when he breakfasted. Of course he had previously, on awaking, made a slight, informal meal. After breakfast he perhaps bent his steps to one of the theatres, if he had a new play under rehearsal, or mentally arranged the plan of the next day's composition. On Thursday evenings he was in the habit of receiving his friends, on which occasions no one knew better how to play the agreeable host. During the summer he retired to a country estate, which liberal means, under the direction of good taste, had converted into a terrestrial paradise. Here he enjoyed all the consideration of a grand seigneur, and was regarded with reverence and affection by the poor of the neighborhood, to whom he was liberal in his benefactions.

At a comparatively early age, as far back as 1836, he obtained an honor which every Frenchman of scientific or literary taste covets,—admission into the ranks of the French Academy.

It is an amusing illustration of the business-like method which Scribe carried into his compositions, that one day, looking over the titles of his plays, he found that all the letters of the alphabet were represented except K, Y, and X. Anxious to remedy this unintentional slight, he at once set about writing *Le Kiosque* for the Opéra Comique, *Yelva* for the Gymnase,

and *Xacarilla* for the grand Opéra. After this, as his biographer naively expresses it, the alphabet had no cause of reproach against him.

Scribe's disposition is characterized by his biographer as amiable, his manners as affable and pleasing. Though the large concourse of authors in attendance at his funeral testifies the regard which he inspired in his own class, it is not perhaps singular that his brilliant and overshadowing pre-eminence should have stirred the hearts of some to envy. In the provinces, and in some Continental cities, he was credited with even more than his due, so that, we are told, it was not unusual to see such announcements as the following, on the posters of country theatres: "TARTUFFE, a comedy in five acts, by M. Scribe. — LUCRECE, a tragedy in five acts, by M. Scribe, etc." Another cause, reflecting only credit upon our dramatist, is assigned for a certain lack of cordial regard on the part of some of his *confrères*. Scribe, though affable and easy of access, was quiet in his tastes, and was never seen in the *estaminets*, or beer-shops, where those of his class were much in the habit of meeting. In spite, however, of these drawbacks, he won the cordial respect and regard of those authors whose good opinion was best worth having. This he richly merited, since no one labored more zealously than he to establish the rights of authorship, and to obtain for authors more adequate compensation than before his time had been conceded to them. He was the founder of the society of Authors and Dramatic Composers referred to in the early part of this article.

So engrossed was Scribe with his multifarious labors, that it was not until the age of forty-eight that he found time for matrimony. He selected Madame Biollay, the widow of a wine-merchant. His choice appears to have been a wise one, and productive of much happiness. It is to the lady's credit that, previously to her marriage, she enjoyed the acquaintance and friendship of Béranger.

Enough has been said to give a general idea of Scribe's merits as a dramatist and a miscellaneous writer. Though we cannot allow him genius, applying this word in its broadest and highest sense, he blended tact and talent in a remarkable degree; and this happy conjunction gained for him a success

which never would have accrued to genius alone. Vitet, Director of the French Academy, gives the following just analysis of his prominent characteristics : —

“ His wit was supple, inventive, adroit, never-tiring, full of unexpected turns and sprightly sallies. Eager for success, he knew how to bear failure ; he was impatient only of repose. One success only urged him to attempt another. His most dazzling triumphs served but as a spur to his activity. Thus for fifty years his inexhaustible talent was employed in the service of four theatres at one and the same time. He devised plots by hundreds, created characters, imparted to the improbable all the charms of reality, accomplished in his single person more, perhaps, than all his rivals together, and, rounding off a half-century of labor, has left us the charming recollection of his talents and his virtues.”

ART. III. — *The Trial of the Constitution.* By SIDNEY GEORGE FISHER. Philadelphia : J. B. Lippincott & Co. 1862.

THE trial of the Constitution has been in progress ever since it was adopted. At that time the authority of the nation, as it existed under the Revolutionary government, and under the Confederation, had become practically extinct, for the want of power to enforce such ordinances and requisitions as it was constitutionally authorized to make. The national authority had to be organized anew, and on the basis of an entirely new fundamental law. The only practically efficient power was then exercised by the local authorities, not by constitutional right, but by usurpation against the national authorities, who were denied the power to perform their own constitutional duties, or even to defend their own existence. They could not protect their own frontiers, execute their own laws, pay their own debts, fulfil their own treaties and contracts, or even defray the necessary expenses of their own nominal administration.

It was necessary to make an entirely new adjustment of the relative powers and duties of the general and local governments. Obviously this could not be done by those governments